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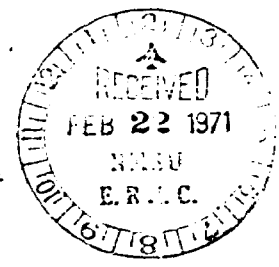
ABSTRACT

The National Study of American Indian Education has documented a broad consensus among parents, students, teachers, and influential persons that the most important role of the schools is to prepare Indian students for employment in the dominant economy and for successful lives in the sociocultural mainstream. With occasional exceptions, curriculum for Indian children in both Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and in public schools parallels the curriculum provided to non-Indian students in the public schools. There is virtually no quarrel with the principle that the curriculum for Indian youth should include the very best curriculum provided non-Indian youth, but several major areas stand out as issues of concern. Among these are the inclusion of tribal culture and history in school instruction, language instruction, vocational emphasis, and attention to the dignity of Indian identity. Whatever curriculum developments take place in American education, it is unlikely that Indian parents will want anything less for their children than the same curriculum offered to other Americans. The most outstanding difference, however, is that Indian parents would like the schools to give recognition to Indian identity. (JH)



The National Study of American Indian Education

USOE Project No. OEC-0-8-08147-2805

FINAL REPORT

Series IV. No.4

CURRICULUM FOR AMERICAN INDIAN YOUTH

Estelle Fuchs

[1970]

NATIONAL STUDY OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

The attached paper is one of a number which make up the Final Report of the National Study of American Indian Education.

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The Final Report consists of five Series of Papers:

I. Community Backgrounds of Education in the Communities Which Have Been Studied.

II. The Education of Indians in Urban Centers.

III. Assorted Papers on Indian Education--mainly technical papers of a research nature.

IV. The Education of American Indians--Substantive Papers.

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CURRICULUM

In its most traditional sense, curriculum refers to the content of subject matter presented to pupils. The larger, more contemporary usage refers not only to content but also to the services provided children by the school, including the social climate for learning.

With occasional exceptions, curriculum for Indian children in both BIA and public schools parallels the curriculum provided others in the public schools of the various states in the nation. This is due to the influence of accrediting agencies, state guidelines, availability of texts, the influence of teacher education institutions, and to the prevailing educational fashions of the day.

The National Study of American Indian Education has documented a broad consensus among parents, students, teachers, and influential persons that the most important role of the schools is to prepare Indian students for employment in the dominant economy and for successful lives in the socio-cultural mainstream. Thus there is virtually no quarrel with the principle that the curriculum for Indian youth should include the very best curriculum provided the non-Indian youth of the country.

This does not mean, however, that the present curriculum is without criticism or escapes controversy over focus. Several major areas stand out as issues of concern. Among these are whether or not tribal culture and history should be included in school instruction; language instruction; vocational or academic emphasis; attention to the dignity of Indian identity.

These are not issues which have arisen only in the present. They have been concerns over a considerable period of time and current discussions and proposals are better understood with some attention to an historical view of the issues involved.

History

Western education and formal schooling was introduced to the Indians by the earliest missionaries to America. The jesuits, mainly French, were active in the St. Lawrence River, Great Lakes region and the Mississippi between 1611-1700. Their goals were to teach Christianity and French culture, following the order of Louis XIV to "educate the children of the Indians in the French manner." To accomplish this, the Jesuits removed children from their families and tribes. They taught French language and customs, and emphasized the traditional academic subjects. Singing, agriculture, carpentry, and handicrafts were also included.(1)

The Franciscans, mainly of Spanish origin, entered the south with Coronado, influencing the peoples of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and California. The policy of the Franciscans was to gather the native peoples into villages around missions. Families were kept intact. The schools, while teaching Spanish, did not emphasize the academic subjects, placing greater stress upon agriculture, carpentry, blacksmith work, masonry, spinning, and weaving.

The Protestants also established schools, primarily in the east. King James on March 24, 1617 issued a call for the education of the Indians and clergymen such as John Eliot took up the call. Dartmouth was founded for the education of

"youth of Indian tribes. . . and also of English youth and others." Harvard was established for the education of English and Indian youth, and the campus of William and Mary included a special house for Indian students in 1723.

On the whole, education in the colonial period offered a curriculum to Indian youth that was the same as that offered non-Indian youth with major emphasis upon the area of academic study in all but the Spanish dominated colonies. The school was established as an agent for the transmittal of western culture and civilization, and made no attempt to incorporate Indian languages, culture or history in the curriculum offered.

The colonial period over, the new United States of America treated Indian peoples as foreign nations with whom it concluded treaties. Indian education was influenced by the great religious awakening which took place in the new nation in the first quarter of the 19th century. The Bible was the book, the primer and hoe the weapons of those who sought to moralize the Indians rather than physically exterminate them. Education was viewed as the better weapon in the battle to destroy Indian languages and customs.

Also, the emphasis upon vocational education took strong hold in the 19th century. In 1879, Congress appropriated $100,000 for industrial schools. In that year, too, the first off-reservation boarding schools were built. Much of the education remained in the hands of the missionaries, the various religious sects being apportioned the educational responsibility on the reservations by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a practice subsequently declared unconstitutional.

The off-reservation boarding schools of the period emphasized strict military discipline, removal of the students from their homes, a work and study program including an outing system in which Indian students lived and worked with white families, and a curriculum stressing the industrial arts. Throughout, language instruction was in English, and pupils were actively discouraged from speaking their home language or retaining tribal identity.

During the period of land allotment, after 1887, when deliberate efforts were made to convert all Indians to farmers and to break up the reservations and Federal responsibility established by the treaties, the schools were viewed by the government as preparing Indian youth for independence and full citizenship. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs in his annual report of 1901 stated:

> "Abolish rations and annuities, throw the educated Indian on his own resources, and the settlement of the Indian question is the natural sequence."(2)

Federal education policy did not succeed in totally destroying Indian identity in part because so little schooling was available to Indians (there were 16,000 pupils in 113 schools, ages 5-21 in 1901.) Also there was resistance by Indians to this kind of forced assimilation by education, a factor made evident by the Commissioner's report which reads:

> ". . . gathered from the cabin, the wickiup, and the tepee. Partly by cajolery and partly by threats; partly by bribery and partly by force, they are induced to leave their kindred to enter these schools and take upon themselves the outward semblance of civilized life."(3)

Official policies of forced assimilation continued until the Meriam Report of 1928.(4) Until that time, curriculum duplicated that of other American schools with considerably more emphasis placed on vocational subjects and institutional work in the boarding schools.

Although it continued to view assimilation as a goal, the Meriam Report did mark the point of departure from the deliberate anti-tribal language policies of the past. During the administration of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, between 1935 and World War II, a conscious effort was made to encourage bilingual education, and to establish day schools. An effort to fill the void left by conventional teacher training institutes and prevailing curriculum was made by encouraging the writing of materials in several Indian languages. World War II interrupted this formidable task of restoring recognition to Indian languages and cultures.(5)

The policies supported by John Collier continued until the 1950s when the Federal policy of termination of the reservation system saw many Indian children moved into public school systems which had no special language or Indian culture programs for them. Since that time, there has been a growing interest in BIA schools in special programs of language instruction, and a growing interest in public schools, especially in areas of heavy Indian concentration, on special language programs.

By now the goals for Indian education have moved toward maintaining respect for Indian culture and the dignity of Indian peoples, while maximizing the capabilities of students in the larger American society and economy. Curriculum efforts to support such goals have yet to be made on a large scale.

Language

As the more detailed analysis of the NSAIE findings indicate(13), it is clear that the Indian pupils as well as their parents accept the need to learn and study in English. For example, only four students out of 1,200 interviewed indicated that they believed that knowledge of their native language was more important than knowledge of English.

Although recognizing the necessity for English competency, there are strong positive attitudes toward the tribal language as well held by those interviewed. Three-fourths of the students indicated an interest in learning their tribal language, and 68 percent of the parents thought it would be nice or important for the schools to offer instruction in the native language.

Despite the shift in official policy toward permitting children to use their home language without fear of punishment, stress continues to be placed on the teaching of English in BIA and in public schools, and instruction is almost universally given in English.

There are no clear data on the numbers of Indian children entering school with competency in English. The BIA estimates that two-thirds of its children speak another language. Many Alaskan native children and many Navajo enter school with no or little command of the English language. How best to teach English has been of considerable interest in recent years, and has resulted in growing interest in linguistic approaches. Currently approaches to language instruction include:

1. Using linguistic techniques to teach English as a second language, moving the children from their use of the native language to the use of English as the language of instruction.
2. Bilingual education, which employs two languages as the medium of instruction for a child in a given school in any or all of the school curriculum except the actual study of the languages themselves.
3. The teaching of the native language as a separate subject.

The BIA has encouraged the use of ESL (English as a Second Language) in all its schools. Teachers have been encouraged to attend linguistic institutes sponsored by USOE, NDEA, and EPDA programs. The BIA also conducts workshops in ESL methodology. In addition, the BIA sponsors a newsletter, English for American Indians, initiated in 1968-1969.(6)

The past year has seen considerable emphasis upon testing and evaluation of the ESL program. An English language proficiency test is being devised for the BIA. Preliminary data from the test indicate that 63 percent of the children enrolled in BIA schools speak English as a second language. Currently, a study by the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) professional organization has been commissioned by BIA. The English language program of the Navajo Area office is being developed along this line.

Proponents of bilingual education argue that it is a more humane approach to instruction, avoiding the frightening, frustrating experiences of the non-English speaking child in an all-English environment. They argue further that there is evidence that bilingual instruction makes for improved intellectual functioning; that it indicates respect for the native culture and helps retain pride. Proponents also argue that bilingual programs provide employment for native speakers as teachers, consultants, and in curriculum development, and that community and parental involvement with the school is more likely to occur given a bilingual program. Bilingual education is proposed not simply as a bridge to the past, but for its positive value in providing familiarity and skill in the handling of different cognitive systems. In a multi-national, multi-ethnic world, language is seen as a key to identity and protection against alienation and disorientation.(7)

The last four years have seen the development of several bilingual programs in BIA schools. Some examples of these are the beginners classes at Rock Point, the Rough Rock Demonstration School, and the Toyei Boarding School, all on the Navajo Reservation. Six BIA kindergarten classrooms had bilingual programs in 1968-1969, and the program was extended to the first grade for 1970-1971. In addition, the BIA is conducting a bilingual program in isolated day schools in the Bethel region of Alaska. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has sponsored bilingual education programs in several Head Start classes. There are no large scale bilingual programs in state schools.

Many difficulties stand in the way of the development of bilingual programs. Perhaps the most important is that many Indian languages have no standard orthography. In addition, although the theoretical problems involved in bilingual education have been explored, the practical experience with the

day to day problems of teaching remain to be examined and reviewed.

The dearth of relevant teaching materials also remains a problem, much of the material available having been developed in other countries and therefore not suitable for Indian children. Among those working on the development of curriculum materials for bilingual, bicultural programs are the Southwest Cooperative Regional Laboratory in New Mexico, the University of Texas, the TTT program of the University of Washington which is developing Navajo curriculum, and the Rough Rock Demonstration School.

Other critical problems include the shortage of teachers trained to work in bilingual situations and the lack of adequate funding.

Although Indian languages are no longer being stamped out as a matter of official policy, there remains a resistance to bilingualism on the part of many educators committed to English-only policies, and acting out an implicit melting pot philosophy which assumes the assimilation of Indian pupils in a one-way direction. Members of the non-English speaking communities themselves, having been taught that it is English that is utilitarian in the school setting, are not always convinced of the need for bilingual programs. Evidence from our study, however, points out that a majority of parents interviewed wanted some recognition of tribal language and culture by the school. The value of bilingual education as the most effective route to an excellent education may be increasingly accepted given the success of model programs. Certainly, despite all the problems inherent in bilingual education, it would seem practical, in the near future to have such programs in communities where the native language is the home language and to concentrate efforts in this direction in the early grades. Careful planning with local communities is an essential ingredient in the success of bilingual programs and such programs should not be imposed without community approval and support.

The NSAIE found considerable support among Indian youths and their parents for instruction in the native languages themselves, as subjects of study, within the schools. Even in the most acculturated situations, e.g., Chicago, children interviewed expressed an interest in the Indian languages.(8) In areas where there is a large concentration of Native speakers, and where there is this interest, schools could make provision for the teaching of a course in an Indian language. This is valuable not only for its general cultural and cognitive aspects, and the recognition it accords the Indian community, but also in providing interested students with the necessary skills to function more effectively as potential teachers, administrators, scholars, in reservation development, etc. Teachers of these courses can be recruited from the community or from among the graduates of the growing number of university Native American Studies Programs.

Indian Culture

Again, despite the absence of official policy deliberately seeking to stamp out Indian cultures, curriculum materials and programs incorporating tribal history, culture, contemporary issues including tribal government and politics were generally absent in the schools studied by the NSAIE. Exceptions do, of course, appear. Among these are the St. Francis Mission School in South Dakota, which includes curriculum materials on Indian culture; the Taholah public school in Washington which has developed curriculum including instruction in Quinault language, culture, and history; the BIA has sponsored a

controversial course in Indian psychology developed by Dr. John Bryde; the BIA initiated Project Necessities (no longer BIA sponsored), an effort to develop curriculum materials based on the local experiences of Indian children and including the training of teachers to develop their own materials relevant to local conditions; the Alaska Reading Series is used in many Alaska schools, incorporating illustration and experiences of Alaska and Alaskans as text in pre-primers and primers. In addition, many teachers have made individual efforts to introduce Indian oriented materials in their teaching.

Teachers interviewed by the NSAIE often expressed a desire to teach more accurately about Indian culture, history, and current affairs, but felt severely handicapped by a lack of information and a lack of materials.

A recent evaluation of textbooks used in BIA schools and in public schools was made by the American Indian Historical Society, an organization of Indian scholars. Examined were forty-two American history and geography books, thirty-one state and regional history books, thirty-eight government and citizenship books, eight books about American Indians, and twenty-eight world history and geography books. Most of the texts were found to contain derogatory statements and misinformation about the American Indians. In addition to the inaccuracies and patronizing tone, the study found stereotyping and an absence of material on the Indians' contribution to the development of the continent. (9)

The findings of the Indian Historical Society are supported by a recent study concerning the knowledge about Indians and the attitudes toward them held by schoolchildren and teachers in a Minneapolis suburb. The views held tended to be uncomplimentary and inaccurate. White students showed a depressing lack of facts, and teachers were poorly informed. Thus the texts not only indicate a neglect of Indian pupils, but they perpetuate misinformation for non-Indians. (10)

In its study, the Indian Historical Society accused the BIA of having the most outdated textbooks. It is difficult to compile comparable statistics for public schools, but the BIA itself had studied the textbook situation and reported that 37 percent of its texts are 0-5 year old, 40 percent are 6-10 years old, and 18 percent are 11-15 years old; 4.75 percent are 16-20 years old, and .25 percent are 20 years or more old. (11)

As scholarship and writing in this area improves and as more accurate portrayal of the role of American Indians in the history and development of this country becomes available, more effort will have to be made to feed these materials into the schools. The age of texts are important in matters pertaining to American Indian materials. Equally important is the need to make available in schools attended by Indian youths the most current educational resources in all subject areas.

The concern of Indian scholars for the development of greater accuracy in the content of the curriculum is growing. Their influence upon publishing companies, state boards, etc., will be increasingly felt in this decade. The dearth of accurate textbook treatment of native Americans requires the encouragement and support of Indian scholarship to reevaluate content and to write.

Concerning Indian cultural traditions in the curriculum, it is important to note that historically and at present the school is an agent of transmission of non-Indian culture to Indians. In only a very few exceptional cases, e.g., Rough Rock, is the transmission of traditional Indian culture viewed as a goal of the school to be worked out through the curriculum. There is little quarrel, even among the staunchest supporters of bicultural programs with the view that the schools should prepare Indian youngsters to deal with the larger society. However, the absence of Indian cultural and historical materials are viewed as a denigrating version of the real world. The absence of instruction in current affairs and tribal government is not realistic preparation for dealing with the larger society. Recognition of the Indian presence is valued and is to be encouraged.

Academic and Vocational Training

Throughout most of the history of Indian education, there was a strong vocational emphasis. In recent decades, most high schools attended by Indian youngsters have paralleled the educational trends throughout the nation with its growing emphasis upon a comprehensive education, including academic courses that would qualify successful graduates for college entrance while providing commercial and vocational course offerings as well. Special programs such as the crash literacy program for Navajo have been phased out and replaced by curriculum that generally meets state and regional certification. Vocational emphasis continues to be high, however.

Proponents of academic training see in vocational education a limitation on career choice; others see vocational training as realistic preparation for jobs. Increasingly, however, vocational training has been postponed to post high school programs.

Work-study programs, career development programs, job training programs can be of great value to Indian youngsters before high school graduation. The despised outing system and the institutional labor required of pupils in the old boarding schools should not be allowed to stand in the way of modern programs that can provide the opportunity to earn money, acquire skills, as well as provide useful roles for youth while attending school, whether they are preparing for advanced academic work or not. One of the criticisms directed against some schools for Indian children is that their isolation, both physical and cultural, inhibits the goals and aspirations of Indian youth. Conscious attention to career opportunities in both the Indian and non-Indian communities should be included in the curriculum offered.

It is difficult to school counselors, especially in the public schools, to have access to vocational and educational scholarship information for Indian youngsters. In states with large Indian populations in the public school, it would be useful for there to be a central office which can act to disseminate information to school counselors.

The Context of Learning

Curriculum in the broader sense includes more than the content of course offerings. It may be thought of as including all the services provided children as well as the total social atmosphere of the school. Many factors influence the learning environment. Some of these come from outside the school itself--job opportunities, accrediting agencies, curriculum trends in the universities, etc. Within the school, decor, relations between staff and children, teachers and administrators, etc. are significant. Attention to the Indian presence is valuable in creating a positive learning environment. Too often, educators, believing themselves democratic, prefer to view all children as like. Children differ not only as individuals, but as members of different social groups. Respectful recognition of their identity as Indians will help open the way to a search for better communication between teachers and pupils. Similarly, attention to differences between communities will open the way to more flexible programs.

In his thorough analysis of the literature on Indian education, Brewton Berry found that discussion of the curriculum for Indian students does not loom large.(12) The field studies of the NSAIE confirm this. In general, curriculum in BIA schools has followed that of the larger society, and the curriculum in public schools is the same for Indians as for non-Indians. Curiously, curriculum is taken as a given and is rarely analyzed. Whatever curriculum developments take place in American education, it is unlikely that Indian parents will want anything less for their children than the same curriculum offered to other Americans. The most outstanding difference, however, is that they would like the schools to give recognition to their identity.

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